

Medicine

The women are dancing.
My world has become the dark head of hair in front of me,
parted straight down the middle and braided into shiny ropes.
 Our feet rise and fall,
 rise and fall.
 Our shawls open like the spreading wings of eagles.
There is a rumble on the horizon.
Something big moves towards us.

On the ground, a line of red pony beads wind away into the trees.
 Red like the fringe on the shawl my mother made.
 Red like the velvet that lines my eyelids.
 Red like the blood that wells from the slashes on my forearms.
I slip the beads beneath my skin,
 one for my grandmother,
 one for my grandfather,
 one for my mother.
 One for my father,
 one for the sister that slipped away.
 One for the cousin that took her place,
 one for myself, one for my children, my aunts, my uncles...

I stitch the wounds closed with sweet grass and pine-pitch,
to be read in Braille in case I forget.

But when I wake my hair is still short.
Stretching out my arms, I touch the smooth skin.
I wander the house willing my feet to remember.
I drink a Pepsi and wish it were whiskey.
Out of the corner of my eye I half glimpse sunlight on plaited hair,
the blur of a shawl.

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